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SUBJECT: Southern Sudan: Four Die in Jan. 2 Ambush Southeast of Juba; Local PA&E Employee Details Incident

REF: a) Khartoum 00053, b) 06 Khartoum 02916, c) 06 Khartoum 02667

11. (U) Summary: On January 2, at 12:30 p.m., assailants ambushed a truck carrying approximately 35 passengers about 100 kilometers southeast of Juba, killing at least four and wounding six individuals. A survivor, a local PA&E employee, stated that the assailants were LRA rebels; she provided ConGen Pol Officer with further details regarding the attack. End summary.

Local PA&E Employee Claims Assailants Were LRA Rebels

12. (SBU) One of the passengers traveling in the vehicle was Florence Kasara (protect), a local employee of U.S. firm Pacific Architects and Engineers (PA&E), which is rehabilitating the Consulate General residential compound in Juba. Congen staff interviewed Kasara after the incident; she states she departed Magwi in the steel-sided truck at approximately 12:30 p.m. on January 2 with 30-35 other passengers and their belongings. At a point roughly 25 kilometers southwest of Magwi, halfway between the Magwi and Opari junctions on the Nimule-Magwi road and about 100 kilometers southeast of Juba. Gunfire began approximately one and one-half hours into the trip; as she and several others attempted to look over the side of the truck, she observed approximately 12 people, whom she claimed were Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels, in a fishhook formation extending from the left front side of the vehicle and around to the road approximately 100 meters in front of them. The attackers, who were speaking Acholi (the predominant language of the LRA), wore green camouflage uniforms, used Kalashnikov rifles, and had dreadlock hairstyles common to the LRA. She claimed that several of the attackers, including one that was shooting at her and chasing her from the truck into the forest, were very young. Kasara also claimed that the area was later scoured by SPLA soldiers who found many small footprints -- probably from children -- near the spent shell casings at the attack site. The attack occurred 25 kilometers northwest of Owiny-Kibul, the assembly area designated under current peace negotiations for the LRA elements east of the Nile. (Comment: the attack is one in a series of ambushes along roads outside Juba - see reftels. End comment.)

Two Killed Outright, Others Scatter into Forest

13. (SBU) The truck driver, James Ochit, stopped close to the front line of attackers when the ambush began. As he did, a round fired by one of the attackers grazed his shin. Gunfire killed two people in the truck cab, and injured one other. As the people in the back of the truck started jumping out and fleeing to the north side of the road, Kasara said she saw approximately 35 more LRA rebels coming out of the brush on the south side of the road, all firing weapons in their direction. As the passengers fled to the north, some of the attackers shouted, "shoot the people who run."

SPLA Patrol Engages Assailants

14. (SBU) While the occupants of the vehicle ran from the scene of the ambush, the attackers killed two additional people and wounded four others. Rebels climbed onto the truck and threw the passengers' personal belongings onto the road while others moved it to the brush on the south side of the ambush site. As this happened, three SPLA soldiers riding motorcycles armed with Kalashnikov rifles approached the site from the direction of Magwi. The soldiers stopped approximately 100 meters short of the ambush site and engaged the rebels from the north side of the road. The rebels continued to empty the truck of all the belongings then looted the dead victims of their shirts and shoes and attempted to gather the pants while engaging the three SPLA soldiers. Several minutes after their initial engagement on the truck, and when the truck was empty, the rebels fled in the direction of Womer Mountain, 1.2 kilometers south of the ambush location.

Survivors Return to Juba Four Days Later

15. (SBU) The driver and passengers of the truck ran northeast in the direction of Magwi through the brush away from the ambush site during the engagement between the SPLA soldiers and rebels. After the shooting stopped, the driver and passengers continued through the brush until they reached the village of Payikwara. The villagers helped the driver retrieve his truck from the ambush site later; he gathered the passengers and drove back to Magwi, where they remained for the next several days.

16. (SBU) Kasara departed Magwi again for Juba on January 6 in a truck heading in the direction of Pagiri junction. She saw the

KHARTOUM 00000055 002 OF 002

ambush site, but did not see any of the belongings that were taken during the attack. Kasara remained in Pagiri overnight and then continued on to Juba the next day. During the trip to Juba, she saw an additional three vehicles she believed assailants ambushed and burned. She did not see any bodies at any of the attack sites.

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